

## **The Development of John Deere Tractors and Their Impacts on Rural Life**

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Although farmers had lived without them for years, tractors quickly became an indispensable tool for farmers when they became available. This rapid development caused a huge increase of production at the cost of putting a severe strain on the farmer and his family. One Illinois based company, Deere and Company, often times was the major producer of their tractors.

According to the *Ultimate John Deere*, John Deere was born in Vermont on February 7, 1804. He was the fifth child of a Welsh tailor. Deere moved to Grand Detour, Illinois, in 1836 where he set up a blacksmith shop. In 1837, Deere made the first of his soon to be famous plows. In 1848, Deere moved to Moline, Illinois, to be closer to shipping lines. For the next seventy-one years, Deere and Company stayed out of the tractor business and concentrated on developing plows and other such implements. In 1919 that changed because Deere produced its first tractor, the Deere All-Wheel-Drive. It featured three wheels with two in front and one in the rear. Only 100 were ever produced because it was too expensive. In 1918, Deere and Company bought Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company. This company had already established its own tractor model called the Waterloo Boy. Suddenly Deere and Company was in the tractor race.

Deere's rivals were far ahead. Chicago-based IHC and Detroit-based Ford had tractor lines whose sales were soaring. In 1923, Deere released the Model D. It was the first Waterloo tractor to carry the John Deere name. This tractor set the pattern for all of Deere's two-cylinder tractors. In 1928, the company came out with the GP. This tractor was designed to be a row-crop tractor with the middle row going between the front two wheels. It introduced a power lift for a mounted three-row cultivator and planter. In 1934 Deere introduced the Model A. This was a tricycle row-crop tractor that was almost completely reworked inside. A year later, Deere introduced the Model B. These two tractors were Deere's all-time bestsellers. The B was basically a smaller A. Several specialized versions of both tractors were introduced before the lines were discontinued in 1952. By 1938 rubber tires were quickly on their way to replacing the steel tires of old on almost every tractor in America. In 1937 the company released the Model G. The G was designed to "appeal to the large-acreage corn grower" according to John Deere advertisements. It was the most powerful tractor of the time. The Model L was also introduced in 1937. It was at the exact opposite end of the power spectrum from the G. This tractor was designed for the vegetable growers.

That same year of 1937 saw other change for Deere tractors. The company hired Henry Dreyfuss and his group to style all of the company's tractors. This gave the tractors a more appealing look and a boost in horsepower. It also allowed for better visibility. In 1939 the company released the H. This tractor looked like a smaller A and B. Deere's product lines remained largely the same until after World War II.

Then, in 1947, Deere introduced the Model R Diesel. This tractor replaced the D and was the first Deere with more than fifty horsepower. This tractor tipped off a horsepower race. The next tractors were introduced in 1952 when the fifty and sixty series tractors were produced. Designed to replace the B and A, these tractors made improvements to give "faster starts, snappier response, smoother operation at all throttle settings, outstanding fuel economy, and prolonged spark plug life" according to Deere advertisements. Power steering and rack-and-

pinion adjustments of rear tires were industry first. In 1953 the Model 70 was introduced. This replaced the G. This year also saw the Model forty replace the Model M. In 1955 the Model 80 replaced the R. This diesel tractor was a full five-plow tractor. That year also saw the 20 series tractor introduced. This series increased the power of both the 50 and 60. By 1956, the Model 820 was the leader of the Deere line. The year also introduced the 320. It was a small tractor with the hydraulics of the big tractors. It replaced the 40. There was one more addition to this series in 1958 under the name of 30 Series. This was basically styling changes that made it more user friendly. This was really a mask for a secret project seven years in the making.

In 1959 Deere gave a sneak peak of what was to come. It unveiled the 8010, a four-wheel drive tractor with a rating of 150 drawbar horsepower. A year later it was upgraded as the 8020. Then, on August 30, 1960, the world learned what Deere had been up to. Deere released the models 1010, 2010, 3010, and 4010. These tractors were completely redesigned. They marked the most radical changes since the A and B. Many of the changes to these models led the industry for years.

What did these changes mean for farmers? Farm life had always been hard and it remained hard. In 1900 the average farmer worked 68 hour weeks, 12 hours longer than industrial workers. This was mostly because with more efficient planting and harvesting machines, farmers had to either acquire more acres or give up farming. It was considered normal for the husband and wife to always be tired and for children not to have much childhood. Even though these farmers supplied the food for the nation, electricity, indoor plumbing, and paved roads were rarities well into the twentieth century.

In conclusion, tractors had a profound effect on Illinois farmers. John Deere's company was a major force in the development of larger and more powerful tractors. This made it possible to have larger farms and placed a huge strain on farmers and their families to acquire larger farms. [From Ralph W. Sanders, *Ultimate John Deere*; Keith Miller, *The West: Farming in the Great West (Part Two): Thresher's coming, putting hay in the loft*, <http://hnn.us/articles/656.html#3-27-02>; James A Henretta, David Brody, Susan Ware, and Marilyn S. Johnson, *America's History*.]